



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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MEXICAN WOMAN FOUND GUILTY OF IMPORTING COCAINE INTO THE UNITED STATES

TUCSON, Ariz. - Martha Suarez-Leon, 47, a Mexican citizen, was found guilty of Possession With Intent to Distribute Cocaine, and Importation of Cocaine, 25.81 kilograms, by a federal jury in Tucson. The case was tried before United States District Court Judge Cindy K. Jorgenson from May 6 - 13, 2008. Suarez-Leon remains in federal custody pending sentencing, set before Judge Jorgenson on August 7, 2008.

During the week long trial, the evidence showed that on September 20, 2007, Suarez-Leon possessed 26 packages of cocaine that she had brought from Mexico into the U.S. The cocaine was 81.8% pure according to lab tests and had a total unpackaged weight of 25.81 kilograms (approximately 57 lbs.)

Suarez-Leon was stopped at the Port of Entry in Nogales, Ariz., where a search of her vehicle by U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers revealed the packages of cocaine concealed both beneath and behind the back seat. At trial, Suarez-Leon denied knowledge of the cocaine in her vehicle and claimed that just prior to the offense, her vehicle had broken down on the side of the road and she had taken it to a mechanic. The government presented evidence to refute this claim and to show that the defendant's behavior and statements, both during the investigation and at trial, indicated that Suarez-Leon was aware of the drugs and intended to bring them into the U.S.

Convictions for Possession With Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Importation of Cocaine both carry a minimum penalty of 10 years up to a maximum penalty of life in prison, a \$ 4,000,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Jorgenson will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The prosecution was handled by Angela Woolridge, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: CR-07-1808-TUC-CKJ
RELEASE NUMBER: 2008-117(Suarez-Leon)

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